

What Is This Continued Carnage in Gaza Achieving?

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By Nicholas Kristof
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For now, at least, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel has returned to war in Gaza. Israeli airstrikes across Gaza have claimed more than 400 lives, including those of children, according to Gaza's health authorities, and it seems more clear than ever that Netanyahu doesn't have a plausible day-after plan for Gaza.

The cease-fire between Israel and Hamas was already on life support, and I'm afraid we're now tumbling back into the savagery of a particularly brutal war that has left Gaza with the highest population of child amputees per capita in the world.

Negotiations on continuing the cease-fire were stalled, and Israel's foreign minister, Gideon Saar, said that his country had "no alternative but to give the order to reopen fire." But, of course, Israel had alternatives, as the main advocacy group for family members of Israeli hostages in Gaza noted, albeit alternatives that were not particularly palatable to Israel's leaders. The hostage families group denounced the airstrikes, saying, "We are shocked, outraged and deeply concerned by the deliberate destruction of the process to bring back our loved ones."

Ever since the Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, Netanyahu has brilliantly advanced his own interests while proceeding without any obvious strategy that would advantage Israel. At this point, Israel has leveled much of

Gaza, killing some 47,000 Palestinians, including 13,000 children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Some think those numbers are inflated, others an undercount: The medical journal The Lancet estimated 64,000 dead.

What has all this carnage achieved? Hamas's fighting capacity is badly degraded, the planners of the Oct. 7 attacks have been killed, and Israel has re-established a measure of deterrence: One senior Hamas official said recently that he would have opposed the attack if he had known of the consequences for the territory. On the other hand, neither of Israel's two fundamental aims of the war — freeing all its hostages and destroying Hamas — has been achieved.

The United States has assessed that Hamas has recruited almost as many militants as it has lost, and the group remains in control of Gaza and appears more popular in the West Bank and around the world. Meanwhile, much of global opinion that was sympathetic to Israel in 2023 has turned decisively against it, and fairly or not, the word "genocide" is often associated with it. And the lives of the remaining Israeli hostages are again in peril.

The United States bears special responsibility for the tragedy unfolding in Gaza, because it is American 2,000-pound bombs that have destroyed entire neighborhoods; such monstrous munitions cannot distinguish between militants and infants. President Joe Biden refused to use his leverage to press for an end to the war during his term, and President Trump has already shipped an additional 1,800 of the 2,000-pound bombs to Israel and blithely proposed clearing Gaza of Gazans in what would amount to ethnic cleansing.

With Netanyahu concerned only with his own career, with the United States adding fuel to the fire, with neither Washington nor Jerusalem showing much concern for what civilians are enduring in Gaza, I'm afraid we should brace ourselves for continued bloodshed and suffering that serve no strategic purpose.

Nicholas Kristof became a columnist for The Times Opinion desk in 2001 and has won two Pulitzer Prizes. His new memoir is "Chasing Hope: A Reporter's Life." @NickKristof